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OPEDA

Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

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OUR ORGANIZATION

Let's take a look at our organization and your part in it. Are you thinking too much about what you can get out of it and too little about what you can give? Or, do you think about it at all?

OPEDA has the usual number of officers, an executive committee, two or more council members representing each USDA agency having an OPEDA membership of ten or more, and four standing committees. In addition it has an executive officer who, with part-time assistants, spends

a part of each day in looking after your interests. It has a news sheet issued several times a year for the purpose of informing you of current activities. It holds executive committee and council meetings, and once a month it sponsors a discussion luncheon.

Yet, this set-up cannot be effective without your active participation in the affairs of the organization. Your council members are your representatives. Do you ever get in touch with them and express your views on the

many matters called to your attention in the Kneipp Letters? Or, do you ever get in touch with the executive officer?

There are on our lists many persons with a reputation for vision and ideas. Since OPEDA is an organization based on service to members, what every member thinks and says counts, and we want all of you to be more than just a name on a record card. Let us hear from you!

MILDRED BENTON, Vice Pres.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

▼ **SUMMER SUSPENSION OF OPEDA LUNCHEONS:** The OPEDA luncheons on the third Tuesday of each month have been quite popular. Most of them exhausted seating capacity; at one a dozen or twenty members had to be detoured to the executive dining room or the sixth-wing cafeteria. But during the summer months when Room 6962 is occupied by a half hundred or more physical and mental dynamos, it becomes rather torrid and uncomfortable. For that reason the question was raised at the May luncheon as to a cessation of the monthly luncheons during the summer period, the first proposal being that the luncheons during June, July, August, and September be skipped. However, there was strong support for a luncheon on the third Tuesday of June, the 20th, but a cessation of luncheons during July, August, and September met with general approval, and plans will be made accordingly.

▼ **USDA EMPLOYEE COUNCIL:** So far as the Department of Agriculture hereafter is concerned, there apparently will be little need for enactment by Congress of Representative Rhodes' bill H.R. 3702. The employee council established by the Department should be an effective liaison between the employees and the higher officers of the Department, a means of promoting better understanding on both sides of those desires and aspirations of the employees which have definite merit, and the limitations of law, policy, and finance by which the Department must be governed in its sympathetic consideration of such aspirations and desires.

Periodically some of the employee unions reagituate early enactment of H.R. 3702, but the growing absorption of both Houses of Congress in the complexities of the omnibus appropriation bill and the unpredictable consequences of certain amendments thereof create doubt as to whether employee proposals of these types will receive much if any consideration during the remainder of the 81st Congress.

▼ **MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL AND OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:** The 1950 members of OPEDA's executive committee and council share the common pressure on their working time created by conferences, staff meetings, special interviews, and the bread-and-butter demands of their respective jobs. Nevertheless they have made available the time requisite to the consideration of OPEDA's current and pressing problems. Thus far the council has met twice—initially on January 12, most recently on May 3—while the executive committee has met three times, to wit, January 31, April 11, and May 24.

▼ **AN INSIGNE FOR OPEDA:** Throughout the greater part of OPEDA's history the only tangible proof of individual membership was a small and unimpressive acknowledgment of receipt of annual dues. A more artistic membership card adopted three years ago evoked considerable commendation and appreciation but, carelessly dropped into a desk or bureau drawer or concealed in a wallet, it affords no readily visible evidence of OPEDA affiliation. Some more obvious manifestation of the OPEDA bond of professional interest and relationship doubtless would promote numerous and pleasant associations among USDA folks who otherwise might be unaware of common ties of interest. The adoption of a button or pin might well be considered.

A highly suitable design for an OPEDA button would be the monad which forms the core of the well-known trademark of the Northern Pacific Railway. As used by the N.P. one of the elements is colored red, the other black. OPEDA's basic nature and purpose would be best exemplified by a design in which one element was colored black to represent the soil; the other, a medium green to represent the vegetative products of the soil.

According to the highly interesting booklet issued by the Northern Pacific the design dates back to the eleventh century, when it was evolved to illustrate a system of philosophy

established more than four thousand years previously. "The Illimitable produced the Great Extreme; the Great Extreme produced the Two Principles; the Two Principles produced the Four Figures; and from the Four Figures were developed the Eight Diagrams of Fuh Hi, in 3322 B. C. . . . The Great Extreme is found in the male and female principles in Nature, in the five elements, and in all things." It is difficult to think of any other symbolical figure that would be more illustrative of the nature and range of USDA activities and OPEDA interests.

▼ **STANDING COMMITTEES:** The February newsletter listed the personnel of the Committees on Economic Criteria and Professional Criteria, but at that time scant progress had been made in developing the Committees on Working Criteria and Public Service Criteria. To get those committees under way, particular appeals were made to Carl Colvin of the Farm Credit Administration and to Dr. Carl C. Taylor of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Despite other heavy demands on their time they consented to act as chairmen of the two committees—Carl Colvin to head up Working Criteria, and Dr. Taylor Public Service Criteria. Since then their principal efforts and energies have been devoted to the recruiting of personnel for their committees and the development of subdivisions of committee action within which subcommittees effectively can attack the one, two, or three most urgent problems within the general purview of each committee.

Thus far the membership of the Working Criteria Committee consists of Thomas L. Gaston, SCS; Everett C. Weitzell, REA; L. K. Wright, EPQ; and P. V. Kepner, Extension.

As developed to date the membership of the Public Service Criteria Committee is as follows: Homer G. Smith, FCA; Roy J. Burroughs, BAE; Fred W. Grover, FS; Gertrude Drinker, FHA; Margaret C. Schindler, Library; Strother B. Herrell, Personnel; Raymond H. Davis, SCS; Walter Rich, REA; Paul Maris, FHA; and Walter H. Larrimer, FS.

▼ **CHANGE IN OPEDA STAFF:** Mrs. Agnes E. Meier, having handled OPEDA's finances and membership records with high efficiency for 4½ years, finally yielded to the combined pull of a new Pontiac, a working vocabulary of the Spanish language, and enthusiastic invitations to revisit Old Mexico, and terminated her services with OPEDA at the end of March. Fortunately it developed that Mrs. Mildred G. Pullen, who handles the books of the REA Credit Union and whose husband is connected with REA, had time available also to handle the OPEDA work and she has now become a permanent member of the OPEDA staff. She shares with OPEDA's secretary-treasurer, C. N. Mason, the distinction of having been born in Montana, and this may have contributed to their cordial cooperation in the development of a new accounting system for OPEDA under which the details of its expenditures are crystal clear.

▼ **ECONOMIC DOLLARS:** A former long-time and loyal member of OPEDA now finds that the pressure of present living costs against his modest retirement annuity compels the relinquishment of several cherished organizational relationships, including OPEDA. One observation he makes is that if OPEDA is interested in the welfare of retired employees it might well consider sponsoring legislation that would put annuitants on a cost-of-living basis instead of a fixed value which bears little relation to security.

That comment, however, is equally apropos of the salaries of those who continue in active service. A perfectly logical assumption would be that a group such as the professional employees of the USDA, with their wide economic training and understanding, would look with favor on a form of compensation which bore a definite relationship to the cost-of-living index, rather than to pass

through recurring periods of denial and deprivation as prices soar while salary rates await the slow action of Congress.

As a matter of fact, the records indicate that certain individual OPEDA members have in the past from time to time advocated such an objective. Perhaps they were followers of Irving Fisher, whose espousal of that principle a couple of decades ago gave currency to the term "rubber" dollar but whose views on the subject, although derided by some, had commanded the sincere confidence and approval of many others.

The chief hitch seems to be individual tendencies to shrink from the reduction in number of dollars per pay unit when declining living costs dictated such deduction. More dollars to offset higher prices inspires no trepidation, but fewer dollars in correspondence to declining price indexes engenders serious doubts and misgivings.

OPEDA'S MEMBERSHIP STATUS AS OF JUNE 1, 1950

OPEDA's officers and staff being by nature optimists cling to the hope that many of the 1949 members who have not yet paid their 1950 dues ultimately will make remittance and cause the 1950 membership to mount toward, if it does not surpass, the 1949 membership. However, on the first of June the membership in good standing both by bureaus and by grades was as follows:

Agric. Economics	132	Human Nutr. & Home Ec.	3	GS-5	110
Agric. & Ind. Chem.	78	Information	18	GS-6	10
Agric. Research Admin.	14	Library	22	GS-7	446
Animal Industry	147	Personnel	3	GS-8	7
Budget & Finance	3	Pl. Ind. Soils & Ag. Eng.	159	GS-9	517
Commodity Exch. Auth.	13	Plant & Operations	1	GS-10	2
Dairy Industry	13	Prod. & Mktg. Admin.	155	GS-11	467
Ento. & Plant Quar.	476	Rural Elec. Admin.	126	GS-12	467
Experiment Stations	17	Secretary's Office	2	GS-13	310
Extension Service	48	Soil Conservation Service	612	GS-14	116
Farm Credit Admin.	33	Outside USDA:		GS-15	10
Farmers Home Admin.	61	Food & Drug Admin.	9	GS-16	8
Fed. Crop Ins. Corp.	1	Weather Bureau	5	GS-17	4
Foreign Agric. Relations	14	Other	6	GS-18 or equivalent	4
Forest Service	335			Other	28
		Total	2,506	Total	2,506

The figure for grade GS-18 merits a little explanation in that Claude Wickard of REA actually is a Presidential appointee, while Lyle Watts of Forest Service and Hugh Bennett of SCS were specifically allocated to the \$14,000 salary grade in the bill establishing salaries for the heads and assistant heads of executive departments, so that P. V. Cardon of ARA really is the only one of the four specifically assigned to GS-18 under the revised classification act.

In the new alignment resulting from the revised classification act the major composition of OPEDA membership is substantially the same as under the old classifications. More than one-half are in the four grades GS-11 through GS-14. This confirms the earlier findings that the bulk of the OPEDA members are engaged in types of work which definitely are professional, that they are midway in their professional careers, and that their interests and aspirations are such that an organization such as OPEDA should be able to serve them better by far than the more numerous and populous organizations of Federal employees which necessarily must give major attention to hours, salary rates, and compensatory allowances.

Executive Officer's Report—June, 1950

Kneipp Letter No. 10

This will be the last Kneipp Letter to appear in OPEDA. The ravages of time make it advisable for me to relinquish even the light and pleasant responsibilities of the office of executive officer, and by the time the next issue of OPEDA appears some other former member of the Department will occupy that position. Just who he will be is as yet conjectural. There is plenty of talent in the Department, some of which is retiring almost every month, but some of the

retirees plan definitely to return to the scenes of their childhood or some other earlier period in their career and thus become unavailable, while still others are rather positive in their ideas that complete freedom from responsibility is the most desirable of states and regard with scorn any suggestion that they continue even in minor degree worries of the type that occupied their more strenuous years.

Service as executive officer of OPEDA is an opportunity, a privilege,

and a challenge. There are in the USDA about 25,000 people whose duties and functions are susceptible to professional classification. When one of them retires or dies, the customary recital of his or her scholastic, administrative, or scientific accomplishments often is truly impressive. Through an extended process of educational activity they have mastered and conformed to rigid professional disciplines. In their ensuing professional work they have solved extensive and complicated problems of organization, management, and administration or have achieved distinction and renown in the fields of science in which they specialize. Even the more modest biographies are characterized by evidence of exceptional loyalty and

devotion to duty and of accomplishment definitely above the norm.

It is a wholly reasonable expectation that people of this type can vest the public service with ideals, ethics, principles, and objectives of service far transcending those which characterize the normal relationship of employee to employer or which commonly prevail in industry and commerce. It is on this assumption that OPEDA was founded and continues now to find justification for its existence.

The true function of the OPEDA executive officer is to validate and prove that premise. Of course, the bread-and-butter factors of individual economic security and equity command continuing attention. The Department, the Civil Service Commission, the Administration, and the Congress should be effectively apprised of any deficiencies in the employee-employer relationship which equitably demand correction or adjustment; and no organization, no matter how high its ideals, can afford to ignore that purpose of its existence. However, that is only a part of the field in which OPEDA should function.

Two other major purposes have been recognized throughout OPEDA's entire history but they have not been so well formalized. One of these is the continuing betterment of service to the Department. The other is that of constant enhancement of service to the public. Admittedly the reduction of these abstract concepts to specific forms will be a difficult process. The attempt was initiated last year in the establishment of the Committees on Professional Criteria, Working Criteria, and Public Service Criteria. The members of those committees accepted and gave serious thought to their assignments, but the close of 1949 found the field still comparatively untouched.

These same three committees, with some differences in personnel, again are giving earnest thought to these same subjects. Because of the somewhat vague and complex concepts with which the committees have had to work, the transmutations from the abstract to the specific still remain to be accomplished. The encouraging feature is that the individual members of the committees are so willing to devote so much of their time and thought to the committee assignments.

As has been said before, the trinity of OPEDA objectives has to be symmetrically proportioned. A clover leaf with a huge central leaflet of employee interest, a dwarf leaflet of departmental interest, and a little nubbin of public service cannot command the same appreciation as one in which the three leaflets are equally proportioned.

If OPEDA is to earn and receive general recognition as a major mechanism in the advancement of the work of the Department of Agriculture, as a prime mover in the provision to the general public of increasingly effective and economical types of service, it must do more in those fields. The equity, logic, and integrity of its representations with regard to pay, leave, per diem, disability compensation, auto mileage, cost of transfer of official station, and other items, superficially may seem to determine

whether the new house or the new car or the new television set is or is not within the realm of possibility, but unless those tangible proposals are appropriately flanked or framed by the widely recognized attainments in departmental advancement and in public service, then danger exists that the materialistic presentations will be regarded as one with those of the most grasping and selfish of the employee groups and will be discounted or dismissed accordingly.

▼ **LAG IN EMPLOYEE LEGISLATION IN 1950:** Federal employees are not looming so large on the congressional stage in 1950 as they did in 1948 and 1949. An earlier assumption that during an election year the views and interests of Federal employees would command more than normal attention has not been confirmed. Apparently Federal employees will have to look to the 82d Congress for the fruition of many of their hopes and desires.

The great bulk of legislation affecting Federal employees is handled by the respective Committees on Post Office and Civil Service. According to the latest calendar of the Senate committee covering action to May 9, this field has received during 1950 much less attention than was accorded it in 1949.

In 1949, 38 of the bills handled by the committee were enacted into public laws; for 1950 the record to May 9 shows only 4 bills enacted, none of which affected the classified service. In 1949 the committee considered 42 bills relating to retirement, of which 11 became laws. Six more have been added during 1950 but of these none has been enacted. During the 1st Session the committee considered 37 bills affecting pay for personal services, equipment, maintenance, etc., of which 9 were enacted into law. During the 2d Session 12 more have been added in this category but none has been enacted to date. In 1949 the committee considered 6 bills affecting leave, of which only 1 became law—that authorizing attendance at funerals for deceased members of Armed Forces without loss of pay or deduction from leave. This year 5 other leave bills have been added to the committee's calendar but they have not made much progress, even though 4 of them relate to the postal service with its politically potent array of employee organizations.

So far as rates of pay are concerned the principal current agitation, albeit a mild one, relates to increases in the maximum numbers of positions allowable under grades GS-16, GS-17, and GS-18. One recent proposal has been an increase of 25 in GS-18, 50 in GS-17, and 100 in GS-16. Newspaper comment indicates that some such arrangement is favored by the Administration. In each such advancement there would be an ensuing chain of promotions. That point aside, there is little in the way of pay legislation in prospect during the remainder of the 81st Congress.

Per diem allowances and auto-mileage rates have ceased to be subjects of discussion. The maximum limits established last year seem fully to cover the great majority of demonstrable needs.

The way in which legislation sometimes can backfire has been exempli-

fied recently by Representative Thornberry's bill H.R. 4295. Under the Langer-Chavez-Stevenson Act of February 28, 1948, persons who previously had retired were given a choice between an increase in their annuity of 25 percent but not exceeding \$300 per year, or a life annuity for their wife amounting to one-half of the basic annuity but not exceeding \$600 per year. H.R. 4295 was designed to grant the survivorship annuity where the retiree had selected the increase in base annuity, and to grant the increase in base annuity where the retiree had elected the survivorship annuity. On June 5, when H.R. 4295 was called on the consent calendar for the fifteenth time, there was a curious absence of objection and the House passed it. On June 8 the Senate amended and passed the bill. Under the Senate amendment approximately one-half of the pre-1948 retirees would gain considerable increases in their annuities, even after the currently prevailing survivorship deductions had been made. But where the pre-1948 annuity was \$1,200, later raised to \$1,500, its recomputation under the Langer-Chavez-Stevenson Act, subject to deductions for survivor's annuity, would cut it back to \$1,350—a reduction twice as large as that now made on the first \$1,500 of annuity because of survivorship agreement. Just how the conferees of the two Houses will adjust the difference remains to be determined. The Senate measure would carry out another amendment of the Retirement Act which independently has been actively advocated, namely, a recomputation of annuities of retirees prior to February 28, 1948, under the provisions of the act of that date.

The two major issues which currently concern Federal employees are those of leave and of efficiency ratings or performance evaluations. The question of leave has been greatly aggravated by anticipated deficiencies in national income and by current consideration of 1951 appropriations. The now apparently developing fact that the 1950 deficit will be appreciably smaller than anticipated may minimize the pressure in some degree, at least for the present. It seems reasonably certain that no permanent revision of leave laws will be enacted by the 81st Congress, but it is highly probable that the subject will become a major question early in the life of the 82d Congress.

Some conception of the complexity of this leave question is afforded by the wide diversity of views expressed in recent months by the members of OPEDA. Probably it is true that majority OPEDA opinion strongly supports the present limits of 26 days' annual leave and 15 days' sick leave, but a number of quite specific individual members or minority groups believe that shorter leave periods are inevitable or equitable. Accordingly they suggest compromises of various kinds. One short and simple proposal is to reduce the leave and proportionately increase the annual salary rates. Another is to reduce the leave but permit a larger accrual. Another is to limit the maximum of accrued leave but instead of forfeiture of any excess to allow credit for it in the form of additional retirement annuity. Still other variants are proposed.

The Committee on Economic Criteria in consequence has held several prolonged and prayerful meetings with a view to the development of a leave proposal or policy which would command majority acceptance and approval in OPEDA. The initial or tentative draft of its report was considered at the meeting of the OPEDA council on May 3, but was remanded to the committee for further consideration. Since then a considerable number of quite detailed and constructive analyses of the situation have been received and referred to the committee, and a further draft of its report can be expected for special consideration by the council in ample time to permit the recordation of OPEDA's views and recommendations with the House and Senate Committees on Post Office and Civil Service.

There is a vast process of self-deception manifest in the long-continued flurry over efficiency ratings, for the changes in nomenclature obviously are in the form and not in the substance. Whether the appraisal is termed "performance evaluation" or "accomplishment appraisal" it means, after all, an expression of the quality, volume, and value of the service rendered by the individual employee or exactly the same thing that hitherto has been meant by "efficiency rating."

One form in which this subject came before the Congress was as section 9 of the bill S. 2111, which had been proposed as the Federal Personnel Policy Act of 1949 and which was introduced pursuant to the recommendations of the Hoover Commission. Section 9 of the bill under the caption "Appraisals of Performance" would abolish efficiency or other performance ratings designed to afford a mandatory basis for increasing or decreasing compensation or for promotion, demotion, or dismissal. A new system of periodic conferences between the employee and his supervisor was to be substituted.

Meanwhile, however, the Civil Service Commission submitted to both Houses of Congress a legislative proposal to authorize the establishment of methods for the evaluation of the performance of work of Federal employees. Under that proposal any agency in the executive branch of the Government would be authorized to establish a plan for evaluating the work performance of its officers and employees. Such plans would be effective only after approval by the Commission.

The consequent performance of evaluations would not be the sole basis for any personnel action. Provision would be made for only one impartial review of a performance evaluation if requested by the employee concerned, such review to be by the agency. Automatic step increases or longevity promotions

would be contingent upon the issuance of a certificate of satisfactory service and conduct by the appropriate administrative officer. This bill aroused wide criticism and opposition on the part of the major Federal employee organizations and has not been introduced in the Senate.

In the House the bill was introduced by Chairman Murray as H.R. 7264 but because of the criticisms and objections developed through hearings by his committee it was superseded by Murray's bill, H.R. 7824. That would vest the employee with a right of appeal against what he regarded as an adverse rating, substantially similar to the appeal procedure which now prevails, in that he could request (1) an impartial review of the performance rating by the Department or (2) consideration of an appeal by a board of review to be comprised of one member designated by the officers and employees of the Department, one member to be designated by the head of the Department, and one member (who shall serve as chairman) to be designated by the Civil Service Commission. This bill has been approved by the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service but its comparable approval by the Senate is by no means certain and its enactment by the 81st Congress is conjectural.

In the case of the professional employee who is making a life career of his or her professional service, the question as to whether the periodic evaluation of accomplishment shall be detailed and specific or shall consist merely of a classification as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory," with possibly a third classification as "excellent," is a subject meriting considerable thought. Actually there prevails among the Federal employees a wide difference of opinion as to the procedure which is most equitable or most practicable. Experience suggests that the procedure hitherto in effect and now sharply criticized as unduly cumbersome and ineffectual actually may not be inherently weak but rather have been misapplied. In this case, as in the case of annual and sick leave, finality of decision probably will not occur during the present session of Congress but probability of early attention by the 82d Congress is strong.

As previously announced, the bill S. 1275 at the beginning of the present

session of Congress was referred to a Retirement Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service. The chairman of that subcommittee is Senator Humphrey of Minnesota, the other two members being Senator Long of Louisiana and Senator Flanders of Vermont. S. 1275 was given a prominent place on the subcommittee program. However, the three members of the subcommittee seemed to have difficulty in arranging meetings thereof which would fit in with other pressing demands. In some cases programmed meetings were not held. When meetings were feasible matters other than S. 1275 pressed for attention.

Meanwhile material which OPEDA had prepared and distributed to its members caused a number of them to address letters to members of the Senate and House of Representatives. These evidences of interest from the field were not so numerous or so widely distributed as had been hoped, but some of them were definitely convincing and would impress the Senators to whom they were addressed. Apparently inquiries from some of those Senators as to the status and progress of S. 1275 gradually emphasized the need for some action.

Accordingly the subcommittee early in May reached the conclusion that the appropriate action would be to refer the bill back to the full committee without recommendation as to either its amendment in the manner recently proposed or as to the reporting of it to the Senate. This action was to be taken at the next meeting of the full committee. Since then there has been no such meeting of the full committee, one explanation being a decision on the part of the chairman, Senator Johnston, that no further meeting of the full committee would be held until after the FEPC legislation had been disposed of by the Senate.

No one can foretell what the full committee may decide with regard to the bill, nor what the Senate will do in the event that the bill is favorably reported by the committee, nor what the House will do in the event that the bill is passed by the Senate. Present forecasts indicate that the current session of Congress will continue long enough for the bill to be acted on by both Houses, but only provided that action by the Senate committee occurs in the immediate future. The present problem, therefore, is one of the ways and means through which best to induce the Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service to give the bill early attention and its blessing.

[Signature]

Executive Officer



Livestock

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